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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0152
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0072
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0074
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0139
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHJS/AMCONSUL SURABAYA 0157

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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: POLICE AND SOLDIERS CLASH IN CENTRAL MALUKU: THREE DEAD

REF: JAKARTA 217

This message is Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) According to police and media contacts, early Saturday morning, February 2, a group of Indonesian armed forces (TNI) soldiers from the 731 Kabaresi infantry battalion in Central Maluku attacked local police offices in the city of Masohi on the island of Seram. After an exchange of gunfire that lasted six hours, two policemen and one soldier were dead and three policemen injured. The soldiers reportedly used combat rifles and grenades, burned nine police barracks, and destroyed the official residence of the Police Chief of Central Maluku.

2. (SBU) According to the Pattimura Military Commander, the incident was triggered by a misunderstanding. Reportedly, after a dispute with his girlfriend, a TNI soldier from the 731 Kabaresi infantry battalion failed to return to his barracks. After rumors circulated that he was being detained by police, his colleagues decided to attack the local police station to secure his release. No civilians were involved in the clash.

3. (SBU) Maluku Governor Karel Albert Ralahalu, the Pattimura Military Commander, and the Maluku Provincial Chief of Police (Kapolda) traveled to Masohi to take control of the situation. On February 4, TNI soldiers and police officers met in a tearful reconciliation ceremony at a sports stadium in Central Maluku. The Military Commander expressed his apologies to the Kapolda and pledged to help rebuild the burnt residences and other facilities. As of February 5, all contacts tell us that the situation in Masohi city is "back to normal."

MCCLELLAND